

## The Origin of the Norwegian Compositional Voice: Halfdan Kjerulf

*In mid-nineteenth century Norway, political unrest combined with fervor from the Romantic Movement spurred new expressions of Norwegian cultural identity. Halfdan Kjerulf was the first composer to combine elements of Norwegian folk music (including ornamentation and modality) and Norwegian language poetry with classical composition techniques to create a new genre, the romanse. This art song form with a unique Norwegian sound paved the way for future composers, including the internationally renowned Edvard Grieg, to incorporate these folk elements into other genres of classical music, creating a musical identity separate from the long tradition of German-influenced style. To this day, both musicians and concert audiences outside Norway remain generally unaware of Kjerulf's vital contribution to the development of folk-influenced art music.*

**Keywords:** Norwegian, art song, folk culture

When both professional and amateur musicians think of Norwegian music, Halfdan Kjerulf (1815-1861) is not the first composer who comes to mind. Like all other Norwegian composers, he is almost completely overshadowed by Edvard Grieg. However, Grieg might never have made such a name for himself were it not for the ground-breaking work done by Kjerulf. Indeed, Kjerulf is acknowledged as the father of the *romanse*, the Norwegian form of the art song. He was the first Norwegian composer to break out of the pattern set forth by German musical tradition and, by combining his skills as a melodist with harmonic and rhythmic elements drawn from Norwegian folk idiom, write in a style that truly exemplified the Norwegian spirit and culture.

The budding sense of what it meant to be Norwegian, combined with the fervor of the Romantic Movement, sparked an artistic response that led to new expressions of the Nordic spirit, traditions, and values. In the musical world, this response took the form of the Norwegian *romanse* (plural: *romanser*), which is seen today as the Norwegian language counterpart of the German lied or the French *mélodie*. This comparison led to a misunderstanding of the form from many quarters: some music historians describe the Norwegian *romanse* as being inferior to the lieder of Schubert and Schumann, while others describe them as lacking the true attributes of Norwegian folksong. In reality, the *romanse* was not meant to copy either of these other forms. Rather, it was an attempt to incorporate aspects of the Norwegian culture and psyche into music using Norwegian poetry and, in some cases, folk music idiom. What makes a truly Norwegian sound in music may be difficult for individuals outside the culture to pin down. Nonetheless, Norwegian musicologist O.M. Sandvik writes: “This somewhat undefined quality that is concealed under the term “the national” is nevertheless, for Norwegians, clearly heard.”<sup>1</sup> Thus it may take

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<sup>1</sup>O.M Sandvik, “Musikk,” In *Norge I Dag*, ed. Per Vogt (Oslo: Forlaget Bok og Bilde, 1950), 47. (trans. Fogderud) [The word “nationalist” has many meanings and connotations. In my usage it

1 some exposure to both Norwegian folk music and art music before the  
2 distinction is clearly heard by the non-Norwegian listener.

3 Composers in Norway have continued to write in a semblance of the  
4 *romanse* style even up until the present, but the height of its popularity  
5 occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, a period known as  
6 the “Golden Age” in Norway. This is not only because of the progress made in  
7 developing a representative Norwegian style in music, but in the other arts as  
8 well. This was also the age of playwright Henrik Ibsen, painter Edvard Munch,  
9 and composer Edvard Grieg, who put Norwegian artistic ideals on the world-  
10 wide map.

11 As an independent state, Norway is very young, having celebrated its  
12 centennial in June 2005. During the famous Viking era, Norway was first  
13 united as a kingdom in the year 900 by the powerful chieftain Harald Hårfagre  
14 (Harald the Fair-Haired.) Norway’s power as a nation ebbed and flowed for the  
15 next three centuries, with King Haakon Haakonsson (reigned 1247-63)  
16 extending his realm as far as Iceland, Greenland, the Shetland and Orkney  
17 Islands, and part of modern-day Sweden. However, the nation’s growth came  
18 to a halt during the Black Death Plague of 1349-50, when the population was  
19 decimated to such an extent that the country was affected for the next hundred  
20 years.

21 In 1380 the once powerful Norway came under Danish rule and for all  
22 practical purposes ceased to exist as its own entity. The Danish kings were not  
23 particularly concerned with this northern outpost, and thus the learned aspects  
24 of Norwegian culture languished. There was no royal court, no university, and  
25 no real possibility for the development of a cultural life, due partly to its  
26 geographical isolation. Thus, the country endured what is commonly known as  
27 “the 400 years night” – a time when the only art music was that of the church  
28 (which was Roman Catholic until the mid-sixteenth century and Lutheran  
29 following the Reformation) and German or Austrian music imported from the  
30 Continent. Even into the beginning of the twentieth century little was known  
31 about Norwegian musical life outside the country itself. For instance, J.F.  
32 Rowbotham wrote in 1916, “As late as the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century...in Norway  
33 the only musicians were simple unsophisticated peasants, who, like the  
34 wandering minstrels of the Middle Ages, journeyed from place to place playing  
35 at the doors of generous listeners.”<sup>2</sup> This is not true, as there were musical  
36 societies in Bergen, Trondheim, and Christiania giving public concerts as early  
37 as 1765.<sup>3</sup> However, nearly all trained musicians were either German-born or  
38 German-educated. No inherently Norwegian art music existed and the stylistic  
39 gulf between the music in the concert halls and the countryside was deep.

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refers to reflections of the common culture of Norwegian citizens of the day. I also use the term “culturalist” in place of “nationalist” in reference to creators of poetry, music, etc. who embraced the folk culture. However, quotations retain their original wording.]

<sup>2</sup>J.F. Rowbotham, “Norwegian Music and Its Masters.” *Musical Times* 57 No. 877 (1 Mar.1916): 139.

<sup>3</sup>Christiania (Kristiania is an equally accepted spelling) was returned to its original name, Oslo, in 1905.

1 In 1814, a group of what would now be called political activists met  
2 secretly in Eidsvold (about an hour from present-day Oslo) and wrote a  
3 constitution declaring Norway’s independence from Denmark. The Danes  
4 seemed ambivalent about this push for independence, and rather than deal with  
5 a rebellious colony, handed Norway over to Sweden instead. Conditions  
6 improved greatly as the Swedish king allowed a great deal of freedom to the  
7 Norwegian nation. He established a court and Christiania was named the new  
8 capital. At the time, it was a small city of about 15,000 inhabitants, ill-  
9 equipped for the title or role of capital city.

10 This union under a single king, along with the general unrest caused  
11 throughout Europe by the Napoleonic era, brought about in Norwegian minds  
12 the idea that they somehow needed to create for themselves a uniquely  
13 “Norwegian” culture. They recognized their individuality and were no longer  
14 willing to exist as an extension of Danish or Swedish society. The advent of the  
15 Romantic Movement ushered in a new appreciation for, and focus on, the  
16 Norwegian folk culture and its music. O.M. Sandvik writes:

17  
18 The eyes of the educated citizens were opened to the fact that music signified  
19 much for the social life in the parishes...Many acknowledged that the melodies  
20 were of great value, and then this treasure was brought home to the great public –  
21 accustomed as it was to foreign music – in fine harmonized editions. Little by  
22 little the Norwegians began to understand that beautiful and varied music was  
23 embodied in our folk tunes. These melodies then became a source of life to  
24 Norwegian composition.<sup>4</sup>

25  
26 In 1815, a Norwegian music teacher named Lars Roverud published an  
27 essay entitled *A Look at the Condition of Music in Norway*. In it, he noted that  
28 although there seemed to be a great many good voices in the country, most of  
29 the songs they sang were inferior, with poor texts written by schoolmasters.  
30 There were, however, many good tunes that developed out in the country  
31 landscape. The many valleys in Norway had their own ballads and celebratory  
32 songs that reflected the linguistic and lifestyle differences between the people  
33 who lived in them.

34 Norwegian folk music developed as a vehicle for showing off the  
35 capabilities of a solo instrument—including the voice—or the expertise of a  
36 solo dancer. Complex and elegant ornamentation was the hallmark of the style  
37 and the measure by which performers were judged. Incidentally, while folk  
38 music in some countries has faded in popularity, Norwegian folk music and  
39 dance enjoy an uninterrupted performance tradition spanning several centuries  
40 in some parts of the country—a tradition that continues today.

41  
42 To fully understand the significance of Kjerulf’s achievements, one must  
43 consider Norway’s history regarding music and musicians. It was Ludvig  
44 Mathias Lindeman (1812-1887), a composer and organist from Trondheim,

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<sup>4</sup>O.M. Sandvik, “Norwegian Folk Music and Its Social Significance,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 1 (1949): 12.

1 who began to collect Norwegian folk songs in earnest. Although a direct  
 2 musical descendant of J.S. Bach and an ardent preserver of his music,  
 3 Lindeman devoted much of his time to gathering and publishing numerous  
 4 volumes of folk songs from various regions of Norway.<sup>5</sup> In all, he collected  
 5 some 600 different tunes, which were published in three volumes under the  
 6 title *Ældre og Nyere Fjeld Melodier* (Older and Newer Mountain Melodies.)

7 Norway's first major composer of classical music was Waldemar  
 8 Thrane (1790-1828), whose music shows him to be firmly rooted in the  
 9 Viennese Classical style. His greatest contribution to music in Norway was  
 10 probably not his composing, but rather his strengthening of the general musical  
 11 life in Christiania. He reorganized the music society known as the *Music*  
 12 *Lyceum*, founded a string quartet in the city, and took the post of conductor at  
 13 the new Christiania Theater in 1828.<sup>6</sup> His work helped the new capital to gain a  
 14 more serious opinion about art music that would be invaluable to the next  
 15 generations of composers and performers.

16 Born just four years before Norway declared independence, Ole Bull  
 17 (1810-1880) was to become the first legend of Norwegian music. His prowess  
 18 as a violin virtuoso earned him the nickname "Paganini of the North," but it  
 19 was his appreciation for the folk culture that became his lasting contribution to  
 20 the music of Norway. A child prodigy, he spent his early years in the  
 21 countryside around his native city of Bergen. There he heard the country  
 22 fiddlers playing their *slåtter* and developed his love of folk music.<sup>7</sup> This  
 23 connection to the folk culture later led him to bring folk dancers to the ballet  
 24 stage at the National Theater in Bergen and the Hardanger fiddle player known  
 25 as *Myllarguten* (The Miller Boy) to play concerts in the capital.<sup>8</sup> In 1848, Bull  
 26 himself played the Hardanger fiddle for a student organization in Christiania.  
 27 His great success led him to perform "a famous concert at the *Logen* [concert  
 28 hall] 15 February 1849, where *Myllargutten* performed with Ole Bull before  
 29 the eyes of 1500 residents of the capital. It was a breakthrough for national  
 30 Romanticism in Norway."<sup>9</sup> Bull's concertizing throughout Europe and  
 31 America helped put Norway on the map, but his arrangements of folk songs  
 32 left a more lasting impression on his own people.

33 It was Ole Bull who first gave encouragement to his relative and fellow  
 34 native of Bergen, Edvard Grieg. Perhaps it was Bull's great pride in his native  
 35 country that helped Grieg to establish a strong sense of the Norwegian spirit in  
 36 his compositions by using elements borrowed from Norwegian folk music.

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<sup>5</sup>Nils Grinde, *A History of Norwegian Music*, 152-153.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>7</sup>*Slåtter* are country tunes or dances.

<sup>8</sup>*Myllargutten* Torgeir Audunsson (also spelled Augundson, 1801-1872) was Norway's most famous nineteenth-century player of the Hardanger fiddle: a folk instrument similar to the violin but equipped with a set of drone strings. It can be tuned several different ways depending on the key used in a song and has a unique sound that most unfamiliar listeners would describe as "out of tune." Many itinerant fiddlers of the time were said to have made pacts with the devil in return for their virtuosic abilities.

<sup>9</sup>"Ole Bull" available at <https://www.geni.com/people/Ole-Bull/6000000002512241676>; Internet; accessed 04/28/2023. (trans. Fogderud)

1 Grieg could not claim he was the first to do this, however, for Halfdan Kjerulf  
2 had preceded him in this by some ten years.

3 This new burst of pride in the folk music culture manifested itself in  
4 different ways. Norwegian music historian Nils Grinde states that some, such  
5 as Ole Bull, believed Norway had a ready-made art form waiting in the  
6 mountains and countryside. With that in mind, he brought *Myllarguten* and  
7 folk dancers to the professional stage. The young composer Halfdan Kjerulf  
8 and others, including the poet Johan Welhaven, distanced themselves from this  
9 extreme stance, believing a Norwegian art form indeed had to be built up, but  
10 that folk music had to be ennobled.<sup>10</sup> The simple tunes of the country with their  
11 rustic texts could not, in their minds, be transferred directly to the concert hall.  
12 Rather, Kjerulf supported a more refined approach, with aspects of folk music  
13 incorporated into the classical style of trained composers using texts of  
14 Norwegian poets. Halfdan Kjerulf made his mark upon the musical and  
15 cultural scene by creating music that represented his idea of Norwegian  
16 sensibilities and values. His personal story shaped who he was as a composer, a  
17 culturalist, and as a Norwegian citizen. Further, a study of his compositions  
18 sheds light on the actual musical/textual devices and techniques used to  
19 accomplish a Norwegian “national” sound.

20 Who was this man that he should exert so much force over the musical life  
21 of mid-nineteenth century Norway? Why does he remain relatively unknown  
22 outside Norway today?

23 Pianist Audun Kayser states, “One doesn’t have to go far outside  
24 Scandinavian territory before the name [Kjerulf] appears to be unknown to the  
25 general public.”<sup>11</sup> This idea is supported by the fact that articles available in  
26 many musical dictionaries mention only a handful of his songs, if they mention  
27 him at all. Yet, he came from a well-established and artistically inclined family  
28 in Christiania. His father, Peder Kjerulf, was a respected jurist and his mother,  
29 Elisabeth (Betsy) Marie Lasson, came from a colorful family involved in  
30 theater. Halfdan was the first of six children born to Peder and Betsy. He and  
31 his siblings enjoyed a childhood filled with music, partly because of a man  
32 named Bredo von Munthe of Morgenstjerne, a prominent lawyer. Munthe’s  
33 daughter, Ottilie, married Halfdan’s uncle and another daughter, Wilhelmine,  
34 married Professor Klaus Winter-Hjelm<sup>12</sup>. These two branches of the Munthe  
35 family all lived under their father Bredo’s roof. With a third daughter married  
36 to a leading politician, Frederik Stang, the Munthe clan was an influential force  
37 in the political and social landscape of Christiania. Halfdan spent many hours  
38 as a child listening to chamber music played by the talented family members  
39 and occasionally joined in the music making with his cousins. He felt,  
40 however, that he was not nearly as capable as they were at the piano and often

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<sup>10</sup>Nils Grinde, “Halfdan Kjerulf og Christiania-kulturen; Rapport fra et forskningsprosjekt,” *Norske videnskaps-akademi* Vol. N, (1994): 39-40. (trans. Fogderud)

<sup>11</sup>*Kjerulf Family Web Site*, available at [www.kiermeet.com/Kiermeet/US\\_Pages/Famous\\_kjaerulfs.htm](http://www.kiermeet.com/Kiermeet/US_Pages/Famous_kjaerulfs.htm); Internet; accessed 3 May 2023.

<sup>12</sup>Klaus Winter-Hjelm was a law professor at the university in Christiania. His son, Otto, became a well-known and much-feared music critic.

1 preferred to be an observer.<sup>13</sup> This choice of being an observer would serve  
2 him well later in life.

3 Although raised in a musical environment, there was no doubt that as the  
4 first-born, Halfdan Kjerulf would follow in the footsteps of his father and study  
5 law. He began his studies in 1835 and was nearly ready to take his  
6 examinations in 1839 when he became seriously ill – probably with  
7 tuberculosis, which claimed the life of his only sister, Ida, in 1840.<sup>14</sup> Unlike  
8 Ida, Halfdan sufficiently recovered from his illness such that he was able to  
9 travel to Paris in the summer of 1840. There he was exposed to the exciting  
10 musical life that a large city had to offer. He returned home certain that he did  
11 not want to pursue a career in law. He had the heart of an artist and could not  
12 ignore the longing to be a musician. Fate intervened once again, however, in  
13 February 1841 when his father also died. This left Halfdan, as the eldest child,  
14 with the responsibility of taking care of the family.

15 Drawing on his innate abilities as a writer and observer, he took a position  
16 as foreign editor and critic at a Christiania newspaper called *Den*  
17 *Constitutionelle*. The staff included several acquaintances who were to become  
18 leaders in the culturalist trend: Johan S. Welhaven, Andreas Munch, Peter  
19 Jonas Collett, P. Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe. He continued to work  
20 on his musical skills and in 1841 published his Opus 1: six songs with piano  
21 accompaniment. Remarkably, Kjerulf was at this point almost exclusively self-  
22 taught in music theory. He had taken piano lessons with Lars Roverud and Otto  
23 Wetterstrand, who had likely taught him some rudimentary theory, but  
24 musicologists Patrick Dinslage and Harald Herresthal indicate that a great  
25 portion of his theory expertise came from books. Kjerulf's personal copy of  
26 one of these, Poul Diderik Muth-Rasmussen's *Theoritisk-praktisk Musikalsk*  
27 *Grammatik* (*Theoretical-Practical Musical Grammar*—trans. Fogderud), is  
28 now housed in the Grieg library in Bergen. It is dated 1841, the year of its  
29 publication in Copenhagen.<sup>15</sup> Kjerulf later referred to his early works as  
30 dilettantish, but they showed that he already had what Grinde calls “a fine  
31 feeling for the distinctive sound of authentic Norwegian music.”<sup>16</sup> In 1845 he  
32 was invited to conduct the newly formed Norwegian Students' Male Chorus.  
33 The male chorus movement, which began in Germany, became very strong in  
34 Norway during the nineteenth century, and it was for this type of ensemble that  
35 Kjerulf composed one of his best-known pieces, *Bruddefærden i Hardanger*  
36 (*The Bridal Procession in Hardanger*.) This work had special significance  
37 because it was inspired by a painting (which served as a backdrop for the  
38 performance) by Norwegian artists Adolph Tideman and Hans Gude, and its

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<sup>13</sup>Børre Qvamme, *Halfdan Kjerulf og hans tid* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1998), 11-13.

<sup>14</sup>Ida had been engaged to the poet Johan Welhaven and was the inspiration for some of his most beautiful poems, which were later set to music by Kjerulf.

<sup>15</sup>Patrick Dinslage and Harald Herresthal, “Halfdan Kjerulf og læretiden hos Carl Arnold,” *Studia musicologica Norvegica*, 24 (1998): 15.

<sup>16</sup>Nils Grinde, *A History of Norwegian Music*, ed. William H. Halverson and Leland B. Sateren (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 163.

1 text was by Kjerulf's colleague, Andreas Munch. One could hardly imagine a  
2 more thoroughly Norwegian artistic expression.

3 Kjerulf began teaching piano lessons in 1845 and a year later left his  
4 newspaper position in favor of full-time music instruction and composition. At  
5 this time in Norwegian history, music as a profession put one in the same class  
6 as laborers and was thus a step down the social ladder for Kjerulf. He  
7 acknowledges this in a letter to his brother, Hjalmar, saying, "Since I have  
8 advertised myself in the paper as a music teacher, I will continuously be  
9 excluded from the high places, I should think."<sup>17</sup> Kjerulf had a wide circle of  
10 friends within the cultured set of Christiania, however, and it seems as though  
11 he kept up with the happenings of polite society.

12 Kjerulf was well-connected through his extended family, and was also  
13 next-door neighbor to poet Camilla Wergeland Collett, champion of women's  
14 rights and a great writer of the day, and jurist Peter Jonas Collett. Camilla's  
15 brother, Henrik Wergeland, became an enormous figure in the fight for  
16 Norway to get out from under the shadow of Danish influence.<sup>18</sup> Kjerulf's  
17 former writing colleagues were also active in the movement to build up  
18 Norwegian culture. In short, he was used to being accepted among the most  
19 influential circles in Christiania.

20 Although encouraged by some success, Kjerulf's lack of formal theory  
21 training continually troubled him. Thus, when pianist and composer Carl  
22 Arnold came to Christiania, Kjerulf immediately began taking lessons. A strict  
23 teacher, Arnold helped Kjerulf see his weaknesses as a composer and was  
24 pivotal in helping Kjerulf win a stipend to study music abroad. Kjerulf went  
25 first to Denmark, where he studied for a period with Niels Gade, and then to  
26 Leipzig for the 1850-51 musical season. He attended all types of musical  
27 events, and his often-stringent reviews were submitted to local newspapers or  
28 were distributed through letters to friends. He gave praise when it was due, but  
29 he remained unafraid to speak his mind about what he considered poor  
30 compositions or lackluster performances. In the nearly two years he spent  
31 abroad, Kjerulf studied with Gade and Ernst Friedrich Richter and experienced  
32 an enormous number of concert performances. Thus, he returned to Christiania  
33 in 1851: thirty-five years old and with the music education he had so long  
34 desired.

35 After his studies abroad, Kjerulf took an active role in the Philharmonic  
36 Society (by then under the direction of Carl Arnold) as an accompanist. He  
37 established himself as a private teacher and settled into what would be his  
38 normal routine for most of the remainder of his life: private students in the  
39 morning and afternoon, and parties, concerts, rehearsals, etc. in the evenings.  
40 At the same time, Kjerulf *was* busying himself as a composer and in 1854 sent  
41 four volumes of songs to be published. Other songs were distributed in  
42 manuscript form and Kjerulf's music began gathering fame in Norway and  
43 Sweden. His self-criticism proved as harsh as his past evaluations of various

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<sup>17</sup>Dinslage and Herresthal, 15-16. (trans. Fogderud)

<sup>18</sup>Agnes Mathilde Wergeland, *Leaders in Norway and Other Essays*, ed. Katharine Merrill (Freeport, New York: Books for Librarie Press, 1916, reprinted 1966), 56.

1 performers and composers. He labored at the piano and at one point bemoaned,  
 2 “I can get nothing into shape without revisions.”<sup>19</sup> This deliberate style of  
 3 composition seems to have struck Edvard Grieg as a positive attribute, who  
 4 wrote of two volumes of Kjerulf’s songs published posthumously in 1877-78:  
 5 “Kjerulf was nothing less than skilled. He worked slowly and practiced  
 6 stringent self-criticism before he published something.”<sup>20</sup>

7 Although he grew more and more dissatisfied with what he considered  
 8 amateurish musical performances in the city, Kjerulf continued to be deeply  
 9 involved in the musical life of Christiania until his death, all the while adding  
 10 to his list of compositions.

11 Despite his affinity for the burgeoning Norwegian culture, Kjerulf  
 12 remained outside the circle of the most vehement “nationalists.” In 1859, the  
 13 newly formed “*Det Norske Selskab*” (The Norwegian Society), with its motto  
 14 “Norway, to yourself be enough,” did not invite Kjerulf to their meetings. He  
 15 was referred to as “The Leipziger” because of his training there and was  
 16 somehow viewed as not being “Norwegian enough.” This is especially notable  
 17 because several other composers of Kjerulf’s time were also either German-  
 18 born or German-trained. Nils Grinde quotes a letter written by Kjerulf to his  
 19 friend Julius Nicolayson regarding a chance meeting on the street between  
 20 Kjerulf and Ole Bull:

21  
 22 Finally he took my hand and said: “Be with us, join us; we have it so cozy and  
 23 pleasant [in the club], join us in the worthy cause – it is a  
 24 shame to hold yourself back.” I said they didn’t want me, since I was no more  
 25 Norwegian than this (I showed him the top of my little finger.) Then he became  
 26 suspicious and cried, “Who says that?” and wouldn’t let the  
 27 question alone. But I answered...that that wasn’t the reason I held back. I told  
 28 him I was Norwegian in my own way and had a whole collection of Norwegian  
 29 songs being printed, among them five songs of Bjørnson. So they can see – I said  
 30 sarcastically – that the Leipziger is hardly Leipzigerish after all.<sup>21</sup>

31  
 32 The ongoing effects of his 1839 lung disease continually plagued Kjerulf  
 33 and his last years would be overshadowed by his illness. He died at Grefsen,  
 34 near Christiania, on 11 August 1868 at the age of 53. But Kjerulf made  
 35 tremendous progress from his humble beginnings as a self-taught composer.  
 36 He had familiarized himself with Norwegian folk tunes through the work of  
 37 Norwegian composer and folksong collector, Ludvig Mathias Lindeman,  
 38 setting some fifty folk tunes for voice and/or piano. Yet as Grinde points out,  
 39 “Kjerulf was not satisfied to arrange folk songs. He also wanted to compose  
 40 ‘Norwegian’ music.”<sup>22</sup> Kjerulf loved the folk idiom, but his music also reflects

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid, 76. (trans. Fogderud)

<sup>20</sup>Nils Grinde, “Får vi et nytt Kjerulf-bilde?” *Studia musicologica Norvegica*, 24 (1998): 7. (trans. Fogderud)

<sup>21</sup>Nils Grinde, “Halfdan Kjerulf og Christiania-kulturen,” 46-47. (trans. Fogderud)

<sup>22</sup>Nils Grinde, “Halfdan Kjerulf som nasjonal komponist,” *Musiikki: Proceedings from the Nordic Musicological Congress Turku/Åbo 15-20 August 1988*, v. 1-4, (Helsinki: Musikvetenskapliga sällskapet i Finland, 1990), 180.



1 his admiration for German Romanticism and the music of Schumann,  
 2 Mendelssohn and Chopin. He acknowledged that he wrote songs in two  
 3 distinctly different styles, which he described as “Norwegian” and “general  
 4 European.” Grinde goes further to explain that Kjerulf’s songs really fall into  
 5 three categories: 1) German-texted/German style, 2) Norwegian-texted/German  
 6 style and 3) Norwegian-texted with folk influence.<sup>23</sup> Thus, compositions from  
 7 the third category would be described as *romanser*, whereas examples from the  
 8 first category would be called *lieder*. Songs from the second category could be  
 9 described as *romanser* if their poetry is the factor providing a Norwegian  
 10 quality.

11 Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, Professor of Music at Oslo University, says:

12  
 13 A range of style features in Kjerulf’s melody, rhythm and harmonies have  
 14 connections to Norwegian instrumental and folk music. Characteristic are the use  
 15 of pedal points and suspensions, occasionally on the dominant, open 5ths, sharp  
 16 dissonances like augmented 4ths, Major 7ths and minor 9ths, *slått*-like rhythms  
 17 and modal scales.<sup>24</sup>

18  
 19 Schjelderup-Ebbe further explains,

20  
 21 Except in two volumes... which are transcriptions of melodies collected by  
 22 Lindeman and others, Kjerulf never makes use of actual folk tunes. Instead, he  
 23 shows a remarkable ability in assimilating elements from folk music into his own  
 24 works and thus sets the example for later Norwegian composers. Among the  
 25 most important is his use of modality.<sup>25</sup>

26  
 27 He also quotes John Vincent, who points out that composers such as  
 28 Beethoven, Berlioz and Liszt used modality primarily for the evocation of a  
 29 religious atmosphere.<sup>26</sup> This was not true for Kjerulf, who employed the  
 30 Lydian, Phrygian and Dorian modes, as well as hybrid scales and “pseudo-  
 31 modes” in his compositions. Schjelderup-Ebbe states: “Kjerulf’s modal  
 32 passages have their origin in techniques derived from Norwegian folk music,  
 33 which with his original harmonic imagination he adapted into his own style for  
 34 the sake of additional color.”<sup>27</sup> Nils Grinde puts it simply when he notes, “We  
 35 see from [musical examples] that when Kjerulf wants to write “Norwegian”

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<sup>23</sup>Nils Grinde, “The Norwegian Romance Tradition,” *Music Information Center Norway* 23 September 2002 [web site]; available at <http://www.listento.no/mic.nsf/doc/art2002092315375239402609>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2023. Also available in paper form in *Listen to Norway Musical Review* V. 7, n. 2 (1999): 8.

<sup>24</sup>Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, “Noen tanker om Edvard Griegs gjeld til Halfdan Kjerulf,” *Studia musicologica\_Norvegica*, 24 (1998): 44-45. (trans. Fogderud) The term *slått* (plural = *slåtter*) above refers to a Norwegian country dance or melody.

<sup>25</sup>Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, “Modality in Halfdan Kjerulf’s Music,” *Music and Letters*, 38 No. 3 (July 1957): 239-242.

<sup>26</sup>Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, “Modality in Halfdan Kjerulf’s Music,” 246, citing John Vincent, “The Diatonic Modes in Modern Music,” (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951): 204

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

1 music he ties his works stylistically to Norwegian folk music.”<sup>28</sup> In Kjerulf’s  
 2 best-known songs we find strong melodies with outstanding attention to the  
 3 details of text-setting. He chose to set some of the greatest poets of the day:  
 4 Johan Welhaven, Henrik Wergeland, Andreas Munch and Bjørnstjerne  
 5 Bjørnson. His folk-like settings of Bjørnson’s peasant poetry display a wide  
 6 range of emotion and a deep sense of national character. In works such as  
 7 “Ingrids vise” (“Ingrid’s Song” – see below) and “Synnøves sang”  
 8 (“Synnøve’s Song” – see below), one can identify the ornamentation borrowed  
 9 from the folksong style as well as the meters of the *springdans*, *halling* and  
 10 *gangar*.<sup>29</sup> These elements, combined with daring use of dissonance and folk-  
 11 derived harmonies, were precisely the ones that would later be used to great  
 12 success by Edvard Grieg. J.F. Rowbotham rightly states: “With Halfdan  
 13 Kjerulf we arrive at a new development of Norwegian music. It now strives to  
 14 express not only the soul and charm of its beautiful land, but the spirit of  
 15 freedom which pulsated in Norway’s great struggle for political liberty.”<sup>30</sup>

16 He began his musical studies late in life and endured progress slowed by  
 17 self-criticism and doubt. Yet Halfdan Kjerulf accomplished a tremendous task  
 18 in that he had established for Norway an art song genre of its own. Edvard  
 19 Grieg, who is considered the inheritor of Kjerulf’s innovations, had an  
 20 unsteady relationship with Kjerulf while he lived. However, Grieg wrote in an  
 21 obituary for Kjerulf: “...with a firmness and true love of art he endured in an  
 22 age which has still had no presentiment of his significance.”<sup>31</sup> Grieg further  
 23 acknowledged Kjerulf’s great contribution, saying,  
 24

25 He [Kjerulf] had no predecessor on whom he could lean; only the expression of  
 26 the most primitive intellectual life, the folksong, existed. This he took as a point  
 27 of departure, choosing the art song as his field. For this we owe him thanks,  
 28 because only in this domain was he able to achieve the national color, through  
 29 which our music may obtain its natural and healthy development. Kjerulf’s chief  
 30 importance lies...in the fact that he has known how to strike the national  
 31 strings...<sup>32</sup>  
 32

33 In the end, Kjerulf wrote some 130 solo songs and *romanser*, forty pieces  
 34 for men’s choir and over thirty piano pieces. Sadly, the piano pieces are nearly  
 35 unknown today. They, like his *romanser*, show a strong sense of the

<sup>28</sup>Nils Grinde, “Halfdan Kjerulf som nasjonal komponist,” 185.

<sup>29</sup>The *springdans*, *halling* and *gangar* are the oldest types of Norwegian folk dances. The *springdans* (or *springar*) is a solo and/or partner dance in triple meter, often with varying pulse-lengths depending on its region of origin. The *halling* is in triple meter and may include a section danced with a partner but is traditionally a male solo dance known for its melodic ornamentation. The male solo is characterized by stunts such as kicking a hat held high on a stick or kicking the ceiling of the room. In some parts of Norway the terms *halling* and *springar* are used interchangeably. The *gangar* is a walking dance and can be in duple or compound-triple meter, depending on the tempo.

<sup>30</sup>J.F. Rowbotham, 140-141.

<sup>31</sup>Edvard Grieg, “Halfdan Kjerulf” (Obituary), *Illustreret Tidene*, Copenhagen 1867-68. Reprinted in EGAT, pp.72-74, cited in Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858-1867*, 132.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

1 Norwegian folk idiom. It is interesting to note that Kjerulf often used elements  
 2 of vocal folk music in his instrumental compositions and instrumental folk  
 3 idiom in his vocal music.<sup>33</sup> This may have been seen as unusual in his time for,  
 4 according to Norwegian Hardanger fiddle player and philologist Magne  
 5 Myhren, the tunes were instrument-specific. He says,

6  
 7 *A tulla* (sung) *slått* must have a different character than one that is played, a wind  
 8 instrument like the *lur* gives a completely different *slått* than a stringed  
 9 instrument, and a single-string instrument (like the *langeleik*) does not demand  
 10 the same thing from a piece of music as a more complete instrument (like the  
 11 fiddle.)<sup>34</sup>

12  
 13 This means that Kjerulf was not only an innovator for combining folk  
 14 idiom with classical compositional techniques; he also experimented with  
 15 blending the various Norwegian folk music styles in unexpected ways.

16 Perhaps it is because Kjerulf never composed larger musical forms that the  
 17 rest of the music world has been so slow to discover his contributions. The  
 18 men’s choir movement has faded and non-Norwegian singers today are  
 19 generally either unaware of his compositional output or hesitant to explore it.  
 20 Thus, Kjerulf remains a recognizable musical figure almost exclusively in his  
 21 own country.

22 Yet Kjerulf’s “striking of the national strings” has left us today with a true  
 23 reflection of the Norwegian spirit in song form. In giving us the *romanse*,  
 24 Kjerulf expanded the realm of song literature to include musical styles and  
 25 techniques—the Norwegian sound—not heard in other countries. Had he not  
 26 paved the way for these innovative uses of Norwegian folk music, we cannot  
 27 know how later composers might have used that rich resource. Perhaps even  
 28 Edvard Grieg would have remained inside the borders of his Leipzig music  
 29 education, and we would not know him as the favorite son of Norway’s  
 30 musical history. Thankfully, Halfdan Kjerulf used his imagination and  
 31 wonderful sense for what it meant to be Norwegian toward the goal of making  
 32 music that truly represented his homeland. One can see from the street in  
 33 modern-day Oslo called “Kjerulfs Plass” that Halfdan Kjerulf has not been  
 34 forgotten in Norway. Now it is time for the rest of the world to become  
 35 acquainted with him and his monumental achievement.

36 See musical examples below:

37  
 38 “Ingrids vise” and “Synnøves sang”

39 Reprinted from Fogderud, Marla (2021). *Selected Songs of Halfdan Kjerulf:*  
 40 *An Introduction to a Neglected Master*. Manuscript in preparation.

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<sup>33</sup>Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858-1867 With Special Reference to the Evolution of his Harmonic Style* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget; London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 122.

<sup>34</sup>Magne Myhren, “‘Spelemenner’ av Rikard Berge Eit Stykke frå ‘Norges Musikkhistorie’ 1921” [web site] available from [http://www.folkedans.com/folkemusikk/folkemusikk\\_spelemenner\\_richard\\_Berge.htm](http://www.folkedans.com/folkemusikk/folkemusikk_spelemenner_richard_Berge.htm); Internet; accessed 28 April 2023. (trans. Fogderud) The *langeleik* and *lur* are folk instruments that are frequently mentioned in the texts of both folk and art songs.

# INGRIDS VISE

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

Det var en Springdans, og Ingrid gik foran med store Skridt og mædthfulge Arnesving.  
Svarede efter med smaa Skridt og nedslagne Øine, og Ingrid sang:

(Synnøse Solbakken)

Halfdan Kjerulf

Op. 6, no. 4

**Allegro moderato**

Voice



1. Og Ræ - ven laa un - der Bir - ke - rod bort - ved Lyn - get, bort - ved  
2. Ræ - ven lo un - der Bir - ke - rod bort - ved Lyn - get, bort - ved  
3. Ræ - ven ven - ted bak Bir - ke - rod bort - ved Lyn - get, bort - ved

Piano

6



1. Lyn - get, og Ha - ren hop - pe - de paa let - te Fod - o - ver Lyn - get, o - ver  
2. Lyn - get, og Ha - ren hop - pe - de i vil - de Mod - o - ver Lyn - get, o - ver  
3. Lyn - get, og Ha - ren tum - le - de han midt i - mod - o - ver Lyn - get, o - ver

10



1. Lyn - get.  
2. Lyn - get.  
3. Lyn - get.

1  
2  
3

# SYNNØVES SANG

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson.

"Hun græd ikke, sad stille og stirrende. Under dette begyndte hun at sønnerynne, derpaa syngte lidt højere og saa med klar Stemme følgende Sang."  
(Synnøve Solbakken)

**Andante**

(Nynnende hen for sig selv og ligesom sukkende.)

Halfdan Kjerulf

Op. 6, no. 3

Voice

Piano

*pp*  
Mm...

*p*

*p col canto*

5

*mf* — *pp*

*rit.*

*mf a tempo*

1. Nu Tak for

*p poco rit.*

*a tempo*

9

1. alt i - fra vi var smaa og lek - te sam - men i Skog- og  
2. Le - gen den skul - de gaa ud fra de lø - ve - de ly - se  
3. ven - ted saa man - gen Kvæld og saa did bort un - der Gra - ne -

*p*

1  
2  
3

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